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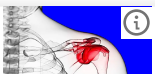
Senior BNP leader urges India to take a relook at its relations with Bangladesh sans Sheikh Hasina

Urging India to keep the "baggage of the past" (BNP's regime in the early 2000s) behind, Chowdhury said: "India has to understand the pulse of the people of Bangladesh."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Former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina File Photo | AP

PTI

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DHAKA: A senior BNP leader has blamed an "ecosystem of former diplomats, bureaucrats, politicians, and think tanks" for creating a "bogeyman" to mislead the Indian establishment into believing that Indo-Bangla relations would deteriorate without the Sheikh Hasina-led BNP.

Days after India raised the issue of the safety of minorities in Bangladesh, Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury of the Khalida Zia-led Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) said it is an "internal matter of the country" but maintained that Bangladesh wants strong ties with India, its next-door neighbour.

Chowdhury's party, the BNP, is an arch-rival of the Awami League (AL), headed by Hasina, who resigned and fled to India on August 5 in the wake of the massive student protests across the country.

An interim government headed by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, assumed charge on August 8 and will continue till fresh elections are held.

Claiming that Bangladesh wants strong ties with its next-door neighbour India, Chowdhury, who heads the foreign affairs cell of the BNP, asserted that New Delhi "failed to understand the pulse of the people of Bangladesh" and had "put all its eggs in one basket" by supporting one party and family in the country in an apparent reference to Hasina and her party, AL.

In an interview with *PTI* here, Chowdhury minced no words against the "ecosystem of former diplomats, officials, politicians, and think tanks" for misleading the Indian establishment on the "hard reality" of Bangladesh and said this ecosystem has destroyed Indo-Bangla relations.

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"This ecosystem has created a bogeyman that if there is no Awami League, there will be security-related issues for India; if there is no Sheikh Hasina, then the country would go into the hands of fundamentalists; if there is no

then the country would go into the hands of fundamentalists, if there is no Awami League, then the Hindus in Bangladesh would be in danger. This is a completely false and deliberate narrative. These people need to wake up now. Bangladesh is one of the most liberal countries; here Hindus and Muslims have lived together for ages," he said.

Across Bangladesh, the minority Hindu population has faced vandalisation of their businesses and properties and devastation of Hindu temples in the students' violence that ensued for days following the ouster of the Hasina government.

"There can be aberrations, but no government in Bangladesh supports attacks on its minorities. The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights to everybody, and above all, we don't believe in this minority and majority concept. We are sorry to say this, but on the question of minorities, this is an internal matter of Bangladesh," Chowdhury said.

"How can others comment on the issue of minorities in our country? How does this come up in diplomatic relations? This is our internal matter. We never complain about what happens to Indian minorities, so no one should comment on the issue of minorities here," he told PTI.

Urging India to keep the "baggage of the past" (BNP's regime in the early 2000s) behind, Chowdhury said: "India has to understand the pulse of the people of Bangladesh. The relationship has to be with the people of Bangladesh. Why does New Delhi have to depend on one person or family? When it comes to Indo-Bangla relations? India has put all the eggs in one basket. That was a mistake on their part," he declared.

"You cannot change your neighbour, and you should have good relations with your neighbour," he said and added Bangladesh wants the best of relations with India, as it is a neighbour.

The former commerce minister during the BNP regime accused the erstwhile Awami League regime of indulging in rampant corruption and working against the nation's interests vis-à-vis various bilateral treaties.

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"As they had captured power through fraudulent elections, they had no accountability to the people of Bangladesh. They laundered over USD 100 billion from many megaprojects and treaties, which were against the

country's interests," he said.

He also underlined the need to relook at those "questionable bilateral treaties, agreements, and contracts as the truth has to come out."

When asked if any bilateral treaty with India, which has faced criticism in Bangladesh, will be cancelled or suspended, Chowdhury, whose party BNP is tipped to be the front runner for the next elections as and when held, said: "We are not singling out India or any other country. But all the questionable bilateral treaties and agreements will have to be re-examined and, if needed, also reviewed. Nothing is going to be suspended or cancelled, as it is the government of the country that signs a treaty. But if it is not in the interest of Bangladesh, then it will be reviewed. This is an umbrella issue," he said.

Replying to a query about the popular perception of BNP regimes in the past not being India-friendly, Chowdhury said, "These are wrong perceptions. India has to leave the baggage of the past behind, and both countries have to work together."

He also said that being vocal about his own country's interest doesn't make him anti-India.

Speaking about the ongoing 'India out' campaign, which he claimed is not a programme by any political party but by the common people of Bangladesh who see India as "an enabler of the autocratic regime."

"So, now in Bangladesh, it's seen as Sheikh Hasina plus India versus the people of Bangladesh. That is why there is this anger against India, as it is considered an ally of the Awami League," he said and added, "Hasina taking shelter in India is also not seen in a good light in Dhaka."

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